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VAIN POMP AND GLORY

*By the same author*

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# VAIN POMP AND GLORY

ABBIE GRAHAM

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. THE VAIN POMP AND GLORY OF THE WORLD - - - - -	II
II. SECULAR SOCIETY - ' - - - -	21
III. CHILDREN IN THE LAMPLIGHT - -	35
IV. HILLS FOR SALE! - - - - -	39
V. THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES - -	47
VI. ANGELS AT HIGH NOON - - - - -	61
VII. AN OLD LADY WITH TEAKWOOD STAIRS	75
VIII. "DON'T BOTHER TO PACK, JOSEPH!" -	83
IX. RANDOM PROVOCATIONS - - - - -	93
X. "BOSTON" - - - - -	113



CHAPTER I

THE VAIN POMP AND GLORY OF THE  
WORLD

“**T**HERE’S glory for you!”

“I don’t know what you mean by glory,”  
Alice said.

*Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously.*

“Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant  
‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But glory doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down  
argument,’” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said,  
in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I  
choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you  
can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty,  
“which is to be master—that’s all.”

—Through the Looking Glass: LEWIS CARROLL.

## The Vain Pomp and Glory of the World

**B**EFORE a sober congregation, in a dull and colorless church on a hill known as Pleasant Ridge, I was ushered into the presence of the vain pomp and glory of the world. I had not been forewarned of this presentation, for this was not the court of Pomp and Glory, and in this company she had no attendants.

My mind was entirely absorbed in solemn matters on this Sabbath morning, for my brother and I were about to unite with the Church. In our family we usually joined thus in groups, the collective method being more economical in that it saved occasions. This public ceremonial was always quite a family ordeal, since we were the minister's children and our behavior was therefore more religiously scrutinized.

Through the long sermon we sat in the seat of honor facing the congregation. We had entire public leisure for the contemplation of this rural assembly of the saints. The congregation had that freshly laundered Sabbath appearance common to country churches, while in the air there lingered the faint odor of shoe-blackening. What the thoughts were of these my father's



parishioners I did not know. I knew only that they sat in rows and that they sat a long time and that they were the Church. Now I was about to join and sit in rows and sit a long time. My father's voice sounded far away.

Then I aroused myself, desiring to get the full flavor of this brief prominence. For the congregation, this was perhaps no event. All children joined the Church, just as all children had measles and whooping cough and went barefoot in summer. Yet for me it was an occasion. I was alive to the immediate situation and the importance of myself, but I did not perceive the invisible drama whose actors were even now beginning to throng the aisles for the ensuing struggle between the two ancient antagonists, the Church and the World.

My father at length finished his sermon, closed his Bible, smoothed down his long, grey beard, and fixed his attention upon us. We were not accustomed to having him look at us with this public expression and we stood up rather hurriedly. He began to read from a black book in a strange, monotonous voice, punctuating his reading now and then with questions which seemed of no great consequence until he came to one which he rolled out with sonorous emphasis. How dull seemed all other words; how grey was every other consideration!

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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“Will you renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world?”

*Would* I renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world? I had so little data in hand, for I was only eight and my field of research had been limited to the windy little prairie towns of Texas. I could not draw upon our family experiences for help in this decision, for we were not a family of pomp and glory. Our possessions were not of this world; we laid not up for ourselves treasures on earth. Here we had no continuing city. Our earthly cavalcade, which was wont to set forth every two or three years on its pilgrimage to new fields of work, presented no doubt a motley appearance—the family cows and calves with the boys driving them, the wagons crowned with bed-springs and inverted dining-room chairs, with chicken coops swinging precariously in the rear, and finally the residue of us wedged into the carriage, which sagged beneath our weight. Was there glory here, or pomp, to assist me in this my hour of need?

Yet I was not entirely without resources to draw upon in the consideration of this matter. Was there not Boston? And God? God, I thought, lived in Boston. This conclusion of mine concerning the residential preference of the Almighty seemed supported by the facts. When the circuit got behind with my father's salary and there

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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was not enough food or clothing for winter, my father and mother, I noticed, would go over to the church to lay before the heavenly council the exact state of the family needs. The answers to their prayers always came postmarked "Boston." For me this settled the matter. Boston was the City of God, and as such it held my entire allegiance; it was enthroned in my affections. By Boston was my theology shaped, my imagination stirred.

Now the word of the Lord as it came from Boston was the missionary barrel. How uneventful and barren seemed the lives of the other children in the community who knew not the joy of this special dispensation. How unromantic appeared the charted existence of these children of the laity. Any afternoon when we came home from school there might be a letter from Boston stating that a "box" or "barrel" was being packed for us. As we came in, the joyful news was relayed to each one and we took turns reading the letter. When it came to me I cared not so much to read it as I did to hold it in my hands and wonder at its coming. How fine was this Boston stationery; of what superior quality! On such afternoons there was an air of holiday in the house. No one thought to remind us to change our school clothes.

When the barrel arrived with the smell of

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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mothballs oozing out through all of its cracks, it brought fine linens, and bisque dolls with joints, and beautiful candy with silver tongs such as we had never seen, velvet trimmings and pearl buckles, and a small leather horse for this brother who was joining the church with me. How good they were to see, to touch—all these things from God in Boston! What a relief to be reassured that in some part of the world God had “ready money”; in our section He seemed “land poor,” with his money tied up in the cattle on a thousand hills. But in this Celestial City people were swift to do his bidding and all their acts were righteous altogether—and always about this City of God there hovered the delicate aroma of mothballs.

I was not, therefore, without facts upon which to base my answer to this question which was being presented to me. I looked at my brother. He was about six and was dressed in a little suit made out of one of my father's. Would he renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world? And I, what *should* I do? I, clad in the reformed clothing of older sisters? This was a triumphant moment. What if my spirit swaggered a bit in the presence of this somber congregation! It was as if they suspected me of having vast stores of concealed grandeur. Should I, or should I not, forego this glory? I stood there for a moment

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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irresolute while all the splendors of my world passed swiftly before me—the thin moon that hung over our barn at evening, the tricycle in the Montgomery Ward catalogue, the premiums in the *Youth's Companion*, and candy with silver tongs. I might answer, "No, I will possess all these things!" Then I should walk proudly down the aisle and with vain pomp sweep out from the view of this astounded and humble company. At least I should have the approval of Boston.

But I was the minister's child. Public opinion thus in rows was all in favor of the renunciation—I could see that plainly. Beauty here was a rejected cause. As I looked out over the congregation I saw that they eyed me solemnly; nor did I detect any sign of rebellion in my brother. He seemed perfectly docile in this immense situation. My father stood there saying, "Your answer is: 'We renounce them all.'" I saw clearly that he did not consider this an occasion for originality. I wavered. I gave up the idea of walking proudly down the aisle. The world was beautiful to see, to hold, but I must forsake it because of the public opinion of the saints. I must desert Boston. I heard my brother and myself repeating together the solemn words: "We renounce them all."

Then my father dismissed the congregation and the aisles soon became so clogged with slow-



## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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moving parishioners that my brother and I could not make our way out. I found myself, who but a moment before had been clothed with a certain prominence, completely hidden by the stiff push of skirts. I stood swallowed up in this solid Sabbath apparel. But at the door there was the relief of fresh air and summer sunshine and prairies in bloom.

We could not go immediately home as could the others, for, being the minister's family, we had to stay until the last. I went out to the carriage to wait. The horses were stamping their restlessness to be off. There was the sound of the slapping of reins on the horses' backs and the scraping of carriage wheels as people backed and turned. The leather cushions in our carriage were hot from long exposure to the sun and I alternately sat and stood, thus creating a cooling breeze. When the seat was moderated sufficiently for continuous sitting I gave myself up to the affairs of the morning, but I was a bit subdued by the spiritual heritage bequeathed to me by the saints of Pleasant Ridge. Perhaps this was the time when I began to plan some day to call on Boston and make inquiry there first-hand concerning the vain pomp and glory of the world, unencumbered by public opinion.



CHAPTER II

SECULAR SOCIETY



## Secular Society

**B**UT "the world" was not yet done with me. Though I had permanently given it up at the age of eight, yet when I was ten it took notice of me in a small way, disguising itself under a pseudonym which was a trusted household word in the countryside. This was the manner in which it first made overtures to me. "Old-John Thomas," the rural mail-carrier, came driving down the long lane in his black hack, and checked his horses in front of our door.

"A letter for you, miss," he called.

"For me?" Surely he must be mistaken, for only grown people received letters.

"Yes, it says you. Weren't you looking for a letter today?"

"No. I don't know anybody *off!*" I confessed, pointing toward the end of the lane.

"It seems somebody knows you."

I took the letter. It was from Montgomery Ward & Company, Chicago. I had always felt very pleasantly toward Montgomery Ward's, especially after having ordered and received some Christmas presents from them the year before, using money I had made by selling bottles to the



drugstore man. What could they be writing to me about? The letter began intimately, "Dear friend." I felt flattered. My heart warmed as I read on, for they were inviting me to visit their store when I "chanced to be in Chicago." When I "chanced to be in Chicago"—I liked the sound of these words, for they implied that I often ran up to Chicago. I could see myself entering their store and announcing, "I chanced to be in your city for a day and I had your letter asking me to call." I proudly shared the letter with everybody. The younger members of the family were impressed but the older ones smiled curiously and inquired a bit too politely, "You'll be going to Chicago soon?"

"Some day," I announced definitely.

Montgomery Ward's and Chicago became for me now interchangeable terms—Montgomery Ward's was Chicago and Chicago, Montgomery Ward's. This personal friendship with Chicago began to give a new direction to my life. Money assumed a fresh potency. I entered into the only successful financiering project of my earthly sojourn—cotton-picking. The fields were truly white unto the harvest and they were paying seventy-five cents for the picking of a hundred pounds. My family protested but I argued, employing tears at appropriate intervals, and pleading, "The field isn't far away and everybody else's

## SECULAR SOCIETY

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children are picking and I'll rest when it's hot at noon and I'd so like to make some money!" My persistent plea was in time effective. The brother who had joined the church with me also desired to pick cotton, and an older sister. For a while they accompanied me but they were not properly inspired as was I, having never been initiated into the company of the "friends" of Montgomery Ward's. The brother became a decided liability and a hindrance to my financial career, picking only enough to make a comfortable bed out of his sack and dropping off to sleep anywhere he happened to be. I had many searches for him and would find him inconspicuously curled up in the shade of a cotton row.

Week by week my enthusiasm grew. Every morning I resolved to pick faster, and I watched hopefully each weighing of my sack. I so envied the older persons who picked, for they could pick with both hands and "carry two rows" at once, whereas I had to use one hand to steady the cotton boles and could carry only one row. But I picked steadily on, getting up early, eating my breakfast and packing my lunch quietly so as not to waken the family, for they might decide that I should not go that day. I liked going down the road alone when the morning was cool, and no one talked to me, and I said no word to anyone.

Altogether I made thirty-one dollars that sum-

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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mer, thirty-one silver dollars. Each Saturday afternoon I brought my new dollars home and piled them one on another. I liked their ridged edges; and they were cool to touch. Money had for some time had a peculiar charm for me. It had not gradually dawned upon my consciousness but had come with a clinking rush of silver in the lamplight as once I had watched my father untie a large handkerchief and spread out on the table the salary which he had just received at the Quarterly Conference. There was intrinsic beauty in this silver, scattered carelessly in the lamplight, and I inferred, too, from the attitude of my father and mother toward it, that it possessed some mysterious extrinsic power. As I looked on the silver dollars and saw a face engraved thereon, I secretly concluded that these were the features of God. Who else could hold such an exalted position? Though I had by now discarded the belief that this was the likeness of God, yet there still clung to silver money some fragment of reverence which greatly enhanced the value of my store of wealth.

One rainy afternoon in the fall, when the cotton was too wet to pick, I came home early and found awaiting me the new catalogue from Chicago. I was tired from dragging the heavy sacks of cotton, made heavier yet by the rain, but I could not of course admit my weariness. I put

## SECULAR SOCIETY

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the catalogue on the floor before the fireplace, spread my silver dollars on the rug, and lay down, chin in hand.

I wonder that the critics of our rural culture have omitted to speak of the literary influence which the large mail-order catalogues have had on country life. I know of no more successful achievement in the creative literature of rural circles than these enormous paper-back tomes. Where will one find more truly inspired exposition? If life grew dull, I got out the big catalogue and drank in its inspiration. Every object to which the author turned his pen glowed with interest. No vague phrasing here, no indefiniteness, no digressions; instead there were satisfying and convincing details as well as a vast continuity between totally differing objects. The contemplation of its proffered joys was an æsthetic experience not to be despised. These volumes always sent me forth fairly surging with ideas. They made a book a thing greatly to be desired, freeing it from the unhappy compulsion and barren necessity which had obscured the potential delights of school books.

On this day I read eagerly on, pausing now and then to glance speculatively at my private wealth. "This is for this, that is for that," I muttered, moving the dollars about solemnly, as if kingdoms were at stake. I caught a glimpse then of the lure

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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of great wealth and the satisfaction of its accumulation with an understanding that I have never been able to re-experience. The tricycle was now within my reach but I had relinquished it two years before and perhaps, too, I had outgrown the desire for it. On that earlier Sabbath morning at Pleasant Ridge I must have renounced the world only in sections—or had I only put away the world then known to me? I had no misgivings, it seems, about this profligacy in which I was now immersed; but how could I feel any compunctions when Montgomery Ward's as an institution stood almost next to the Church? It was but natural that it should be thus associated, for through the ages practical necessities such as fire and water (and in our neighborhood the mail-order houses) have been considered sacred. There were of course different denominations in mail-order houses as there were various churches; but I should as soon have been a Baptist as order from Sears, Roebuck!

"Nothing from Chicago for me?" I soon began to inquire of Old-John Thomas.

"Nothing from Chicago yet, miss," but he spoke encouragingly. "It's a right far piece to Chicago, you know, and your letter hasn't been gone long," he added, as if to apologize for any remissness which I might impute to this city. I must have become for this rural mail-carrier a dramatized



## SECULAR SOCIETY

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question mark, as I stood each morning punctuating the landscape with intense eagerness. Finally one day he drew rein at our gate and voluntarily announced, "A package for you, miss."

"A very large package?" I asked hopefully.

"Yes, tolerably large for the size of you." He was evidently as relieved as I that at last it had arrived.

I took the large bundle, confiding to him, "It's a doll's sewing-machine, and blunt scissors for my little sister to cut paper dolls with———and lots else," I concluded indefinitely, as the children ran up to help me carry the package in. What a miracle seemed Chicago then, and packages and letters!

When the other children saw the purchasing power of money so satisfactorily demonstrated, a great desire for silver dollars possessed them, also. We surveyed the financial prospects in our neighborhood but there seemed no opening. Perhaps it was the very dearth of gainful occupations that made us seize upon an offer made by our father and mother at this time to the effect that they would give a dollar to each child who would read the Bible through. It had all the appearance of sound business. No risks were involved, as the only capital required was that of time, of which we had a superabundant supply. Four of us decided to accept the proposition, and we formed a sort

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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of club, that we might be strengthened in our common purpose. The two younger brothers could not read, but my sister and I offered to read aloud. The boys were promised the same financial returns if they would listen to the Bible read through.

Never did children begin an undertaking more seriously and hopefully. We hurried home from school each afternoon and lost no time assembling in the "study." We closed the windows to shut out all sounds of neighborhood play. My sister and I took turns with the reading. I was amazed at the solemn attitude of the brothers; they sat in a truly inspired silence. All went well for awhile. The creation of the world, the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, the Flood—all these familiar stories had a new value for us. But when we came to the generation of the sons of Noah, a slight rebellion arose in the club. We sent a committee to inquire if we might leave out this chapter and all similarly listed events. This favor was granted. We read on. I remember especially a large sack of Irish potatoes which was stored in the "study." When we rested from our task we peeled and ate these raw potatoes, sprinkled with sugar. As we stopped to eat we encouraged each other in Biblical appreciation as best we could, measuring the thinness of pages behind us, the thickness of pages ahead. Yet,

## *SECULAR SOCIETY*

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gradually we had to face the facts: this was not the lucrative investment that it had at first appeared; poverty had certain compensatory aspects. One after another began to withdraw and the club soon went into bankruptcy.

But this business failure did not greatly disturb me, for I could give my leisure time to considering the management of my cotton-picking fortune. The secularizing influence which had begun with my association with Montgomery Ward's was now vastly affecting me, insidiously counteracting the ascetic tendencies of my early youth. I began to yearn for a store-bought coat, especially since Annual Conference was approaching and my father thought it likely that we might be moved to "new fields of labor." If we were going to a new circuit in November, I wished to appear well. Did I not know how all the community would turn out to see the new minister's family? I could hear them asking, "How many children are there?"

"About nine it seems," someone would explain. There had never before been this many of us to go to a new circuit. I must have realized that I had to specialize in quality if I were to gain any distinction in this mass society.

"You'd better go to town with your father and select your own coat," my mother suggested, "and

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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remember to get one that will wear well and get it large enough."

So when my father next drove to town I was permitted to go with him. None of the other children accompanied us. These trips with my father always encouraged reflective habits in me, for we drove along immersed in a great silence, since he used such journeys for the incubation of his sermons. He forgot my presence and at intervals when he came to a homiletic climax he audibly commended his ethical conclusions. It was rather disconcerting to have my dreams of a new coat punctuated with a fervid "Amen!" or "Praise God!"

Though we proceeded meditatively we in due time reached the town. I bought a bright navy-blue coat with four rows of braid on the collar and pockets with flaps, also trimmed with braid, a hat to match, and a trunk with a tray. I wanted the trunk because it seemed important that I separate my clothes from the family trunks, now that I had decided upon economic independence. I invested generously in presents for the other children.

At evening as we returned they ran up the lane to meet us and as many as could climbed in—questions incarnate. I told them then of the town. They marveled at the trunk tied on to the rear of

the buggy. "But just wait till you see my coat!" I announced. This was followed by awed silence.

Such a satisfaction—that coat and hat and trunk! We did move in November and the circuit proved to be a town where almost everybody had store clothes. I might as well admit, though, that this town had its drawbacks. There was a decided irreverence for my Chicago firm. I saw for the first time how distinctly unfortunate socially was this rural passion of mine for Montgomery Ward's. I was made to feel inferior about this enthusiasm. But I myself had little further need of such institutions as department stores, either at home or abroad, for my fortune was now spent. My brief career of money-making was ended. The town offered no remunerative pastimes and I entered the tasteless company of the unemployed who had no immediate business other than that of growing up.



CHAPTER III

CHILDREN IN THE LAMPLIGHT





## Children in the Lamplight

*H*OWEVER barren and uneventful life became, this glory of the world, to which the Church continued to make vague allusions, pursued me. No definition was made of this pomp and glory but it resounded in my imagination like the hoof-beats of some approaching messenger who never quite arrived. Some days it seemed almost to overtake me when I came suddenly out upon prairies blue and lavender and yellow in the spring.

Some echo of it was resonant in the words which my father read aloud in his rich Scotch voice, as he sat by the lamp just before he wound the clock: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands . . . the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea."

What was this glory about which they were ever silent? Was it some wonder that had lived long

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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ago when the world first felt the inspiring breath of God; when his finger-work of golden light first threaded the great dark with radiance? Was it in the court of ancient kings who sent to far lands for silver and peacocks? Or in the Temple where blue-robed priests adorned with golden bells and pomegranates waited before the Lord of the whole earth? Sometimes I felt it to be resident in that mysterious land to the north, beyond the prairies, from which the wild geese came in autumn with their strange cries. By a lamp at evening this glory might be anything when the mystic cadences of old poetry thronged the soft light of a bare grey room.

How can children who have thus waited in the lamplight at evening do other than set their hearts upon exploring this mysterious thing? I had of necessity to make research into the pomp and glory of the world.

My search has been seasoned with the greater diligence because of the remembrance of my lack of æsthetic data at the age of eight. I have felt the need of arming myself with facts in case I should be unexpectedly seized and brought before another tribunal such as the one at Pleasant Ridge. Against this dire exigency I have made the following notes, that record occasional experiences in which I have felt myself in the presence of the pomp and glory of the world.

CHAPTER IV  
HILLS FOR SALE!



## Hills for Sale!

I CANNOT say what a desire for hill possession seized me as I read this sign, placed conspicuously by a roadside which leads from a city to outlying hill country:

BUY A HILL WHILE THEY LAST  
THEY ARE NOT MAKING ANY MORE OF THEM!

It was as if I stood at the huge bargain counter of a gigantic department store where were displayed all the hills of the world; and around me were shoppers rummaging about for just the proper hill of purple or blue, grey or green. I could hear the winds sweep by, and on some hills the rain was falling. A resonant voice echoed through the tiers of these lofty commodities, crying, "*Hills for sale! Hills that are out of print!*"

I fell into an æsthetic panic. Here was I who owned no hill standing before the entire earthly aggregation of hills, the last of which were being rapidly sold. I was even being led to believe that there would never be another edition. I could not make my way about for the throngs of shoppers. There were those who were searching

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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for hills that overlooked the sea and others who sought for hills with waterfalls. "May I see the seven hills of Rome?" one prospective buyer asked.

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the hill attendant, "we haven't many left and they are rather badly damaged by fire."

I did not hear the gentleman's final decision, for another purchaser crowded him out. "I'm next!" he shouted. "*I* must have a hill and I should like it to be one of the famous ones. What do you have?"

"Here's a little hill that is much talked of."

"Let me see it. What is that on top?"

"Shepherds who kept watch over their flock by night."

"Sounds awfully ordinary—shepherds and sheep. Are you sure it's one of the first-class hills?"

"Quite sure. It gets as much annual publicity as anything in the shop." With this the hill buyer threw on the counter quantities of silver, till the sound of it rattled through the protesting hills.

The conversation all about me was enchanting. "The hills of Greece," one was asking for, "strewn with Parian marble"; and another sought "the hill on which Confucius stood and felt the smallness of the world." But I could not stop to listen, for I too was seeking a hill which might even now

## HILLS FOR SALE!

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be going. Passing by the more eminent ones, I inquired, "Can you tell me, sir, where the small grey hills are?"

"Twentieth aisle to your right, madam."

Soon I came upon all low hills—grey-clad pilgrims they seemed, singing their way to some holy city. I searched eagerly for a hill silvered over with mesquite brush and *cenisa* bushes. Approaching the vender of all grey hills, I asked, "Do you happen to have a hill with a thorn bush on it with orange berries?"

"A grey hill and a thorn bush with orange berries?" he repeated.

"Yes. You might mistake the thorn bush for gold left by some fleeing Spaniard. There would be cattle trails, too, and perhaps the clinking of a bell."

"What is its name?"

"Juana Hill."

"The elevation?"

"It is high enough for seeing all the sky on a spring morning. There might be rain on it and it is a good hill for thinking."

"Is this it? Flat grey stones and scarlet cardinals?"

"Yes!" I reached out my hands for it.

"Just a minute. How do you wish to pay for this, cash, or——?"

Then I remembered. I had not any money. If



I could only charge it and have it delivered to me the following February in the city—but what security could I offer? Hopelessly hill-less, I turned away.

Soon, however, I fell into talk with shoppers. “You have found your hill by the sea?”

“Yes, and it has eleven pine trees. The schooners will pass near, and when it storms the seagulls will gather.”

“What is that shouting? Do you hear it?” I asked.

“The noise comes from those hills there which that little man in the striped suit has just bought.”

“Did he buy all of them? How could he use a whole range?” I asked in amazement. But I had no need to hear the reply, for when I looked up I understood. I saw men swiftly lasso the hills with roads, and upon these highways of the air a garish procession of red-robed figures honked their way upward, taking their station here and there as if by appointment. The Socony high priests were ascending the hills to minister before the motorists. In their wake followed a queer assortment of attendants intoning their petty wares. The conquered hills lay helpless.

Then I remembered Pan, whose pipes had once filled the hills with music and thronged the dusk with stars. Whither had he fled? To the mountains of the moon to awaken them from their pal-

## *HILLS FOR SALE!*

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lid sleep and to stir their listless rivers into song? Where now were the nymphs and their adoring shepherds, with their wooden bowls of foaming milk and their Sicilian garlands?

Would the silver hammers of leprechauns no longer sound through the twilight of Irish hills? If these shoemakers should cease to make shoes for the fairies, how then could they dance behind the waterfalls? Would the little folk then leave Ireland and depart for some green isle anchored lightly within a windless sea?

Where would the prophets take refuge now that their silences were being laid waste? To them had the angels ministered and for them birds had filled the mists with radiant melodies, restoring their spirits.

When the pilgrims of the world should find their holy lands for sale, where would they go to build their altar fires, and what clean wind would speed upward the fragrance of their incense?

And those who climbed the trails over the hills, with desire in their hearts to brush the underside of a star or lay hold of the hem of the garments of morning—what would these do when they learned that their high sanctuaries were in the possession of those who besought them to kodak as they go or to send a postcard back? Does the hill-climber have need of such things as these?

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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Can he ever forget the touch of the clouds on his face or the sight of limitless space? If he has had such tangible fellowship with the eternal, need he seek material evidence by which to declare to others that he has found the gods at home? Will not some convincing fragrances from these high altars cling to his garments? Will not some residual glory linger with him that shall make known the shining revelation of the stillnesses?

Would not the gods give heed to these hill-less ones if they knew of the desolation of the high places? Above me I could see the Greek hills over which wingèd messengers had hastened to Olympus. Was there not now some swift-footed courier who would lay before the Makers of hills the needs of prophets and pilgrims and leprechauns? Might not Pan himself, that favorite of the gods, go for us? Surely somewhere in the twilight he could be found. "Beloved Pan," I called, "sing to the gods in behalf of hills."

I could hear Echo, adored of Pan, mounting the heights in search of him. The tops of the pine trees moved in the wind. There was a stir of all wingèd things and then a stillness. "Tell them," I pleaded, "how flat a town may be; how lost in stars a hill."

CHAPTER V  
THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES

*The treasures of true kings are the streets of  
their cities.*—JOHN RUSKIN.

## The Streets of Their Cities

**I** CAME at length into the streets of their cities. My arrival in Chicago had been so delayed by the affairs of youth and other prairie appointments that I was too late to take advantage of the invitation from that hospitable Chicago firm, delivered to me by Old-John Thomas. I should have reached Chicago while the glory of that blue flannel jacket was yet undiminished. The years had cancelled this possibility and already I had laid this occasion away among the unseized social opportunities which I would fain have accepted. Chicago without the romance of Montgomery Ward's was as a pudding without its sauce. I had business in Boston at some future date but I was not yet prepared for this interview—my soul being in no state of worthiness to enter the celestial city.

But a city alien to my dreams, the veritable Sodom of camp-meeting oratory, New York, now received me kindly. I had first heard of New York one summer evening on the prairies. Under an open arbor, in the flare of kerosene torches whose flames were blown about by the night wind,

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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a voice of doom etched on the imagination of a country congregation the wickedness of this sulphurous city of destruction. Though this traveling evangelist described New York in some detail, I think he could never have been there. He made no mention of the forsythia in Central Park, nor of the way the mist rolls in from the sea at night and erases the outlines of towers and tall buildings, leaving the lights suspended in a soft gloom. Perhaps there were no traffic lights on Fifth Avenue to splash wet streets with green and red, no pedestrians with colored umbrellas passing by St. Patrick's as the snow whirled about its grey spires, no singing Irishmen on parade, no balloons at windy corners. How could he have ignored so many of the salient features of Sodom if once he had walked through Central Park in spring or one winter morning had crossed Fifth Avenue? It may be that he considered these things as disastrous to his thesis and wilfully suppressed them.

A city of error it may be. I can, perhaps, never shake off the suspicious attitude early engendered in me, in spite of the innocent sunshine of this metropolis, the immaculate blue of a morning, and the guileless grocer who trusts me with a pound of coffee. Yet into these streets an unsophisticated glory finds its way.

## *THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES*

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### I

On the eve of the city spring I have lingered in the desolate parks to consider the northern sparrows, the meek of the air, whom we have with us always, the ethereal proletariat who cannot go south in winter. How dispiriting bread-winning must be in this darkest snowstorm before the dawn of spring, when the larders are frozen shut and the hands that feed are either stiff with cold or else not yet returned from summering in the south.

On one such morning as I passed an affluent cathedral, I saw sparrows at the exalted entrance, about a festal board of snow. I drew near, and saw that the bread of their feast was cut in peculiar squares. Could it be crumbs fallen from the table of the Lord? Perhaps some saint had strolled out from the chancel and had shared with them the holy bread. How truly liberal had the cathedral become, thus dividing its sacred portion with the sparrows in their need! Such incomprehensible progress in racial fellowship may have been achieved, or it may not have been—I do not dare to interview the bishop concerning the feathered poor. But now and then when the snowstorm has cleared and the sun shines over this white damask hill I find myself announcing, “The sparrows are doubtless at morning communion!”



## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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We have long delayed our recognition of sparrows. They have ever been companioned with things of low estate such as farthings, that very ignominious coin. This may be the reason for the association in my sympathies of city sparrows with their brothers in adversity, the city pennies. Birds of a feather they! Certain city officials seem to suspect any civilian who chooses that humble form of transportation, the street-car, to be in perpetual alliance with this mean system of coinage, and shout their morning greeting: "Do not drop pennies in the box!" Street-car conductors address one with such emotional prejudice against the in-offensive penny that one wonders if they have had unpleasant connections with it. Perhaps in their youth they militantly parted with loved pennies, donating them against their wills to a cause foreign to their interests. With resentment they may have heard "the pennies dropping." If that were the case, they would naturally select a vocation that would daily satisfy their desire for vengeance.

I have been spared this unpleasant emotion about pennies and I wish to plead their cause as having basic rights in our monetary system and to make protest for the sparrows as well. Especially would I stand wing to wing with the sparrows on that day in spring when the grackles return from the south, slick and neatly pressed, chattering of lettuce in southern gardens and of worms in the

## *THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES*

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early roses. The ill-kempt, rumpled sparrows must then feel the inequalities of the social order.

### II

I have watched the mysterious rites that usher in a city morning. To the milkmen has been given the divine mission of dividing the night from the day; and to these it is appointed to attend the dawn with threshold oblations. Nor does the city fail to do homage to these unseen escorts of the day, who minister with invisible hands. Through the myriad apartments the chorus of the dawn goes, yawned by millions who wake to do them honor:

That must be the milkman!  
Yes, it is the milkman!  
We hear his milk cart rumble  
And now his bottles rattle.  
Aye, the morning approacheth.  
Ah me! Ah me!

Then are the feasts of the morning spread but not always are the rites of the feasts fortunate. Some stealthy hand may impiously remove the door-step libation and the morning news, or an absent-minded mortal may send heavenward the ungodly stench of burned toast and cause disaster to descend upon the day.

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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Later all make haste to gather themselves together to join the great processional, not forgetting to pay their tribute money as they enter. In the streets the blue-uniformed priests of the wheelèd hurry lift their white hands in hasty benediction over the speeding multitude that is forever going and yet not gone. Swiftly the ziggurats of business fling wide their doors to receive all who would do obeisance to the necessities of life. Then, if all proper ordinances have been observed, is morning the high silk hat of the city day.

### III

I was already contemplating the subject of æsthetic plagiarism when I came upon those belligerent little placards that punctuate the parks of an avenue of this city:

PLEASE KEEP OFF

NO DOGS ALLOWED

WE MADE THESE PLOTS BEAUTIFUL

HELP US TO KEEP THEM SO!

How in a garden could one be so contentiously boastful! "We made these plots beautiful!" I watched one year the method of creation which they pursued. They borrowed of the Universe some bulbs, grass seeds and ready-made grass.

## *THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES*

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From the same source they secured winter snow, spring rain and several months of sunshine. They stirred up the dirt here and there and then announced with pride: "We made these plots beautiful!" But those of us who had beheld the process knew that they had but typed the manuscript, correcting, perhaps, some erroneous tendencies here and there but making no vital alterations.

On certain mornings I look up and down this proper avenue and feel assured that the decorous dwellers must revolt against the impropriety of these ill-mannered signs. Surely they cannot, for instance, approve of this race prejudice against dogs. It is absurdly old-fashioned, for the social canine status is now assuredly established in this limousined society. Sometimes, when the red tulips begin to bloom, I reword in my mind these officious little signs:

WE, GARDENERS OF GOD,  
HAVE SOUGHT TO TEND  
THESE PLOTS. WE INVITE  
ALL DOGS AND HUMANS TO COOPERATE.  
HUMBLY YOURS,  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

One must not, however, censure this city unjustly, for it is so busy extinguishing fires, conducting parades, darning its pavements, and run-

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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ning new tape in its street lingerie that it cannot be expected to have leisure to consider these æsthetic injustices. It does not know that red tulips and green grass are but potential components of beauty, that its production is a cooperative enterprise. The alchemy of its creation is dependent upon catalytic agencies that lie within the heart of a person. But how could one ever get the attention of this industrious city in such a non-utilitarian cause as this?

### IV

At evenings I find the city dwellers uniting in what resembles that ancient custom, the ceremony of the Consecration of the Dusk. Like the women of India, chanting through the dusk that has gathered in their houses, holding above them lamps in the darkness, so does the city lift high its lights in the enfolding gloom of the night. Beautiful are the lights, flaming forth litanies in green and red and blue. I have stopped now and then to listen to the words of this chanting, to read the sky-written language of their hymns of praise, eager to repeat with the city its evening creed. I catch these refrains:

I'D WALK A MILE FOR A CAMEL!  
and

GOOD TO THE LAST DROP.

## THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES

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Now that the city has put its faith into words, I begin to disagree with it. Would I really "walk a mile for a Camel," twenty city blocks, from Forty-second Street to Sixty-second Street? Perhaps all other people are thus energetically devoted to "Camels." If so, this enthusiasm in itself would explain the congestion of the pedestrian traffic. If only a million of the many millions of people in this city should do a daily mile in quest of a "Camel," think how this devotion would dam up the urban arterial system!

"Good to the last drop!"—that is, if one likes cold coffee, but who could have any pious reverence for this beverage lukewarm? Vain repetitions these!

Over the river that broadens its dim way to the sea other luminant professions of faith shone:

MAZOLA—LINIT

LINIT—MAZOLA

*The time now is 6:01*

The river, in league with whatever cause this might be, re-echoed with blurred gleams of mystic intonation:

MAZOLA—LINIT

LINIT—MAZOLA

*The time -----*

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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What gods were these to whom the city was lifting up its voice? Mazola might be one of the lesser deities of the early American, a god of streams perhaps. But why was this litany of running waters punctuated with hieroglyphics of time—6:01, 6:02, 6:03? Time was irrelevant to such river beauty as this.

A home-going sense pervaded the dusk. All the traffic was homeward-bound, flashing red tail-lights of departure. I could but envy the automobiles as they went, for even the meanest of these sent forth a joyous signal that the day was ended and evening was at hand. Yet I stood in the greyness of the twilight a dull figure, hardly distinguishable from the drab pavement. Was there no way by which home-going pedestrians might grow luminous, haloed with joy, radiating the tidings that they, too, were going home, that in some small corner of the apartmented air candle-lighted dinner tables awaited them, and books, and good company? Must we leave this glowing expression to taxis, trucks and limousines?

But in some New York evenings I have found radiant satisfaction within a darkening cathedral. Here the prayers of the city flower exquisitely in the vast arched stillness, yellow blooms that must some fruitage bear if the god of the worshippers has eyes to see. As if some understanding of this beauty before me consecrated me as a priestess of



## *THE STREETS OF THEIR CITIES*

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this lambent poetry which dramatizes the wishes of these suppliants, I beseech their god to listen, and taking a candle and taper I call from the darkness a mystery of yellow light. The word-equivalent of this candle which I light might be: "O Thou of the Lights, Keeper of the sun, moon and stars, these are the prayers of the city. Gather up their frail petals before they are shattered in the night." Or again, this ambiguous medium of flame set in a bowl of scarlet may in words mean: "This is the loneliness of the city. Bless to us all suffering and pain." Or a candle may send upward this message: "This is because there are distances. It is for the seas that we here have never known, the lands that we shall never enter, for the illimitable spaces and all mysteries. . . . Guard thou those who travel by sea and land." Sometimes I do not myself know what words the candles represent and the desire ascends on articulate golden wings without any intermediary words of mine. I leave the cathedral then, glad that my continuing petitions create loveliness through the night.

As I go northward, ascending the heights of the city, I have sometimes stopped to look back, and I have seen the city lift her glowing face into the night, about her throat looped necklaces of speeding lights, held together here and there with emerald and ruby snaps.

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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Sodom, was this? Might Babylon have sparkled so with layered light when there was banqueting in the high-hung gardens? Did Jerusalem shine thus in the hearts of Judean exiles on the banks of the river of willows? Was there likeness here to Athens, long-remembered, or to that colonnaded city of the Nile?

CHAPTER VI  
ANGELS AT HIGH NOON



## Angels at High Noon

**I** WAS going out to tea one afternoon, going by subway. This plebeian route is often a favorite method of transportation if my destination promises to be an occasion of moment. In this way I am tangibly reminded of just how many other persons there are in the world and also of how numerous must be the social terminals in a universe so vast, so gregariously populated. I thus go my way clothed with a more proper humility. I was in that subconscious state of "shuttling" when I came upon a woman heavily laden with innumerable suitcases, packages, and pocket-books. She had just added to her burdens by purchasing a newspaper, which she was trying to hitch under her arm. Being in a distinctly gay mood I stopped and inquired: "Are you going to the shuttle?"

"No," she replied with that depressed subway bewilderment, "I am going to Connecticut."

I began to look about for signs that might eventually lead to Connecticut. Taking some of her bags, I silently accompanied her. In time we came to the turnstile of separation, she to Connecticut,

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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I to afternoon tea. With an unexpected burst of enthusiasm she said, "You're a perfect angel!" Then she turned and plodded her ponderous way through the underground roar.

I looked about me in some amazement. The surroundings were certainly not the orthodox environment of angels; not a sacred oak in sight, no brook, no mountainside, no road, just a maze of white tunnels filled with noise and hurry. I glanced at myself with surprise. I a perfect angel? Did I *en route* to a tea-party look biblical? I had none of the outward insignia of an angel—no robe, no wings. Yet, I considered, we have no account of angels going out to tea, since teas were not hinted at in the earlier social codes, so we cannot be sure what angels would wear to tea. I might be an angel in modern dress; or perhaps some god of festal rites had, without my knowledge, invested me with an atmosphere meet for the high ceremony of afternoon tea.

Whatever might be the interpretation of her mystic remark, I rejoiced there in the subway for the cause of modern angels. Here was one of the multitude, a stolid New Englander, rescuing angels from theology, transferring them from the exalted roads of antiquity to this most proletariat transit way of the latest model in cities. I felt honored that I, of rural middlewestern origin,

## ANGELS AT HIGH NOON

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could serve the holy cause of angels in the streets of a secular city.

Why should not the angels belong to subway travelers rather than be the peculiar property of the theologians? I should think that when angels come to earth they would sometimes prefer to associate with the common throng of us who talk about radios and spring clothes and window curtains, rather than to devote themselves exclusively to the solitary company of the divines who might bore them with "shop talk." Some angels may have strong convictions about the necessity of maintaining the hierarchical order, but it stands to reason that others of them would yearn for democracy. At least this woman from Connecticut seemed to see no social discrepancy in her remark, and she gave the appearance of a person who would not make utterances without evidence in quantity. Practically speaking, if angels are given to ascending and descending, what could be a better locality for the indulgence of this passion than the subway system of any city?

Perhaps I should at this point define what I personally mean by an angel. My angels are in certain respects quite orthodox, at least they have wings. Wings, or their substitutes, are one of the essentials of angels, and without wings I doubt if there can be angels. Wings for angels were first a geographical necessity, for angels must

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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come from heaven and heaven was hung high above the earth. I think it was as people watched the birds flying about the sky, the eagles circling through the aerial spaces, that they thought to give wings to these messengers from heaven. The angels which Jacob saw in his dreams apparently had no wings; they seemed to use ladders instead, but ladders were inconvenient and laborious methods of transportation and soon gave way before the more poetic and less cumbersome device of wings. Though heaven has been geographically dislocated by modern science, I cling to the wings of angels, considering them to be a spiritual necessity.

I should not like to think that our American angels must conform to the practices of the oriental ones of some centuries ago. They should be given room for developing new tastes and activities; but it cannot be denied that those angels who walked the roads of Palestine had an air about them which has set the fashion in angels.

They had a way, for instance, of making their own divine appointments. "And Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him." I can find no record where angels met anyone by appointment. They simply appeared at their divine leisure, accosting mortals who were going about everyday tasks. But they had evident preference for the kind of person who would sleep on a



## ANGELS AT HIGH NOON

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hill at night, mindful of the beauty about him; for campers accustomed to sit long at their tent doors eager for conversation; and for those who walk the roads in spring. It was spring when Jacob went on his way destined for intercourse with the hosts of Jehovah, for he had just finished shearing Laban's sheep. These heavenly visitants seemed not to be prejudiced against somewhat irreputable folk, as Jacob at that moment probably had with him a good amount of Laban's spring fleece and as he had also been recently inclined toward carelessness in his ethics of sheep-branding.

These angels had a delightfully unassuming way of coming to one's tent door and falling into momentous conversation, if they could find people at leisure. They loved being entertained. Abraham's haste to fetch water and food and to provide a place of rest seemed very acceptable to his celestial guests. If he had displayed no eagerness to entertain them, if he had made no haste to broil on the coals of his camp-fire a calf tender and good, if he had advised Sarah to use only the third-rate flour for the cakes, if he had forgotten to provide milk and honey, and if he had busied himself, while they ate, with settling the disputes of his herdsmen rather than standing at attentive leisure under the trees, hungry for conversation,—

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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might they not have gone on their way leaving Abraham poor indeed?

The angels which I have known are of the spiritual lineage of these wayfaring guests who went up and down the land of Palestine, and yet they differ somewhat from them. For me an angel is a beautiful experience that comes swiftly and unexpectedly, which only heaven can explain. I have gone into the cool and fragrant stillness of spring and have found wind-flowers in bloom and Japanese quince. I have watched little roads saunter in and out of feathery green trees and lose themselves in a blue indecision of woods. This unforgettable, swift-winged glory has need of heavenly annotation. The roads of spring are ever brief ethereal emissaries from some land of infinite goodness.

Perhaps nowadays angels are becoming more urban in their tastes on account of the influence of these times. Those two angels who once entered Sodom at even, knocked at the gates of this wicked city of the plains with some misgivings, perhaps, as if a city were unworthy of their presence, their former earthly contacts being chiefly rural. But the angels of my acquaintance delight to walk the city streets. At midnight in a city I came out of a theatre and stood for a moment in the Saturday night crowd at Forty-second Street and Broadway, and there appeared in the throng

## ANGELS AT HIGH NOON

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the very person with whom I had need to discuss this play and the white plume of Cyrano de Bergerac. In expressing such an experience how could I fall into the barren slang of secular prose, "What luck! What a coincidence!" There was a heavenly quality about that meeting and I prefer to say: "As I stood on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway at the theatre rush hour, the angels of God met me, and when I saw them I said, 'These are the angels of God; and this place shall no longer be called the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway but the Crossroads of the Angels.'"

Perhaps it is not that the angels do not frequent our streets and seek appointment with us still, but rather that necessity compels us to decline their divine proposals. They come so unassumingly, preferring to disguise themselves rather than to employ letters of introduction, that we, the terribly busy, are unaware of them, and answer them casually: "Thanks; I'm awfully sorry, but our committee is lunching together today to consider important items." No angel would compete with a committee, for angels are not organizationally minded, and they turn therefore into some side street to find a vagrant mortal, committed to no midday purpose.

One can do nothing directly to hasten the coming of angels, but he can leave margins of leisure

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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for their entertainment in case they should arrive. To go forth into a day with one's mind not completely furnished with opinions, with one's routes and activities not settled in every detail, is to lure the angels. It is well not to wake up every morning with one's luncheon arrangements definitely made. I know that this is not an economical plan in some respects, as it means that one often lunches alone when one might have the pleasant company of other mortals. Especially does this seem wasteful if one begins to calculate how few are the luncheon hours of earth. Yet, just at the point when I am about to be convinced of the unsocial wastefulness of this high-noon solitude, some voice calls over the telephone or comes out of a way street: "Are you lunching with anyone today?"

"No," I reply, "I have no plans for lunch." Not always do these voices belong to angels; only occasionally. One always runs the risk of fetching water and food for mere mortals.

The automat seems to me to be a very likely rendezvous for angels, for it has a distinctly old-fashioned Hebrew atmosphere about it, with all the luncheon guests sitting at meat with their hats on, or standing at high tables hurriedly consuming food, girded for flight. As yet I have detected nothing celestial about these noonday neighbors. So far they seem only to be telegraph messengers

## *ANGELS AT HIGH NOON*

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and policemen and taxi drivers; their conversation has a decided earthly stamp, yet one can never despair utterly of meeting angels here.

I am unable to prove that this method of elastic leisure is the secret of entrance to the significant society of angels, but after some years of experimenting I cannot escape certain convictions. It is the lunch hour that I have most consistently dedicated to uncluttered and informal leisure, and it is the luncheon conversation of angels that I find myself most frequently quoting.

I once made great ado about inviting the angels to tea—but listen to their scorn at being urged to attend upon anything, even tea. A friend of mine was returning from one of those hopelessly far countries which friends seem to have a passion for, and she wrote: “Could we have tea in March somewhere?” I had about a year to make preparation. Of many kinds of people I made inquiry: “Where in this city should one have tea in March?” Persons qualified to advise me made recommendations, taking due consideration of wind and rain, food and sunlight, and of the social prestige of atmosphere in tea-rooms. When the year of preparation was ended, this friend reached the city, to find me thoroughly adequate in plans for tea in a spot where one would expect the angels of God to be in attendance. We waited for the propitious moment.

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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In the meantime, at the height of the noon hurry I met her by chance in a building, and I asked, "Are you planning to have lunch with anyone?"

"No," she said; "I was just going down to the cafeteria. Are you lunching there also?"

"Yes, I'm lunching there also," I suddenly decided.

Who will believe me when I announce that there in that cafeteria, crowded with the noise of clattering trays and silver and argument unending, where one is eternally in pursuit of a paper napkin, where baked beans forever steam and butter perpetually adheres to paper plates,—who could be expected to believe that here "in the heat of the day" the angels came? The round, pleated paper cups grew squattier and squattier, noises became fainter, lights more dim. The cashier collected our checks and we talked on. I knew then that again had the angels come in the historic heat of the day to celebrate their high-noon ceremonial of conversation. There was not the slightest flutter of a wing at the long-planned tea in spite of the perfect temperature of the hot water, the elegance of the napkins, the unquestioned propriety of the atmosphere.

Angels are born for conversation. Evanescent words are they from that realm which is eternal in the heavens. When the talk is finished, though

## *ANGELS AT HIGH NOON*

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we be eager to detain them, they must pass on, knowing that their career is spent, their wingèd course ended. High moments of fortuitous glory are they, flaming tongues which give voice to dumb spirits, that fleetingly we mortals may have understanding one of another.





CHAPTER VII

AN OLD LADY WITH TEAKWOOD  
STAIRS



## An Old Lady with Teakwood Stairs

**W**HILE contemplating the ways of beauty I came upon a story of an old lady who built in her small house some teakwood stairs which led to nowhere. At first I took sides against this elderly woman and her teakwood stairs. What a foolish old lady! I thought of some lines that might fit into a possible village epic:

There was an old woman who had a fine stair,  
But the difficulty was that it went nowhere.

For a while this opinion seemed satisfactory, but I soon realized that the old lady had yet more to say to me. I could not dismiss her vain stairs. They held me as if by some magic spell. I found myself going up and down them, up and down, while sunlight streamed in upon the dark wood through small-paned windows. Before I knew it I was chanting another version of the couplet for the village epic:

There was an old woman who had a fine stair,  
And the *beauty* of it was that it went nowhere.

This new version was a different matter. It held my interest far more than the earlier inter-

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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pretation. I knew then that I must seriously consider these teakwood stairs and the commotion which they had caused in that practical section of Pennsylvania—for these stairs did greatly disturb her community, which looked upon them with determined disapproval. In fact, her neighbors' condemnation of her was so widespread that I felt there must be some basis for their censure.

Of course she laid herself open to community displeasure when she neglected to inform the neighborhood of her motives. How different would have been the community attitude if, when she went to the post-office one morning, she had met some villager and casually injected into the ordinary post-office conversation this remark: "I must be going home because the carpenters are coming today to begin work on my stairs."

"What stairs?" the villager would have asked.

"Some teakwood stairs," she might have answered.

"How fine!"—this from the villager. The villager would then have gone elsewhere, saying, "I saw Mrs. ——— this morning in the post-office and she is having some teakwood stairs built. Isn't that fine?"

"Very fine!" the village would reverberate.

But these remarks were never generated in the post-office. She neglected to lay this affair before

## *OLD LADY WITH TEAKWOOD STAIRS*

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the conversational councils of the town and therefore openly invited social discomfiture. She clothed the stairs in mystery and thus winged the deed abroad.

In addition, the stairs went nowhere. A stair that goes nowhere is a dangerously disturbing event in a conservative and practical society where an egg-beater must beat eggs and a shoemaker make shoes. If she had chosen to invest in books which she never intended to read, she might not have been criticized, for books have an intrinsic air of final elegance about them that serves a purpose, whether one cares to read them or not. If she had built front stairs, which no one was ever allowed to use, which were reserved for hypothetical occasions, this, too, would have been understood; but stairs foredoomed to obvious idleness—was not this madness indeed?

Yet, this elderly woman might not have been at all mad, and the building of these polished stairs might have been the most sane moment of her life. She was a woman who was not likely to have been prejudiced against stairs. Having possibly never lived on the fifth floor of a walk-up apartment and having never climbed to the zenith of theatres, stairs may have had for her an innocent, even pleasant connotation. The turn of a stair may have expressed her ideal of æsthetic good, especially the curve of teakwood stairs. She could polish the

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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dark wood; she could watch the sunlight fall upon it in the morning as she went her way about her lonely house; on still nights she could possess a bit of reflected moonlight. She could contemplate in the solitude of her days this one thing of beauty without offering excuse for its presence. If she chose, on fine mornings, she might go up the stairs and then come down again. After all, who are we to question the wide reaches of such a journey? Who are we to decide that she walks alone there on her stair? What exalted company may not come to her as she ascends and descends?

Might not these teakwood stairs have been her revolt against a materialistic society, wherein a thing is considered good in proportion to its practical usefulness? Might she not have grown weary of measuring all possible investments by the one criterion of serviceableness? It is possible that for once she wished to make a decision on the basis of beauty alone.

If this indeed were her rebellion against utility, her manifesto in favor of beauty, could she have made a more adroit choice than a stair? There is something dramatic about her selection. In this section of the world it is the inalienable right and sacred duty of stairs to go somewhere. To choose stairs, therefore, as the thesis of her æsthetic pronouncement was clever indeed. It was to march

## OLD LADY WITH TEAKWOOD STAIRS

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into the very heart of the enemy's country, to seize one of their own orthodox weapons and wage offensive warfare with it. One can see how a community might easily have mistaken her daring for lunacy.

How easily she could have dealt in subterfuge! She might have built an infinitesimal attic somewhere on high. She could have said to her neighbors, "It is such a comfort, you know, to have those stairs, for I can go up every spring and put away my winter underwear and get out my spring hat." Or if they had merely caught sight of her secretly ascending her stair in the performance of the sacred rite of putting away her winter underwear, they would have been satisfied. They might then have said, "What a dear old lady and what a fine stair! She *has* to get to her attic, you know, and teakwood wears so well." In this practical world the stair would have had an excuse for being and these villagers would have gone down the street feeling that it was justified.

Or if she had only pretended to have an attic, the neighbors could have said one to another over the telephones and over backyard fences: "What a dear old lady and how she loves her stair! Anyone can tell that this attic that she refers to does not really exist. How beautiful is her love of a stair!" But she saw no need of evasion. This stair had no connection with spring hats or winter

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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underwear or with any other practical destination. She wanted teakwood stairs and she had them built.

Her madness was to love a stair; her misfortune, to live in a little house in a land which is utilitarian as yet. If she had been contemporary with the carvers of sandalwood in ancient China, or with the makers of blue porcelain, would her teakwood stairs have been an irreparable blunder? Or if she had lived in some Bagdad of long ago, when men trafficked with the merchandise of wonder, might not her stairs have been joyous thoroughfares lifting the imagination of her neighbors above the ways of earth? Poets of another day might have made her little house a place of pilgrimage. But no poets found their way down this Pennsylvania street or if they did they noticed nothing remarkable. Her immortality must rest upon these plain facts: She lived and loved some teakwood stairs that went nowhere, and after that she died.



CHAPTER VIII

“DON’T BOTHER TO PACK, JOSEPH!”

*Being forced at intervals to consider in this shifting society the material aspects of æsthetic acquisitions and to deal with the practical residue thereof, I seek refuge in the experience of the race.*

## “Don’t Bother to Pack, Joseph!”

THEY were talking as man to man, Joseph of the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Pharaoh of the royal household of Egypt. A little domestic problem confronted Joseph, and Pharaoh, who owed a great debt of gratitude to Joseph, was endeavoring to be of service to him.

The events which led up to the conversation were these. Some years previously Joseph, a member of a large family in Canaan, had come down to Egypt rather unexpectedly. On account of a family misunderstanding which had just preceded his hasty departure, Joseph had not had the opportunity of leaving his forwarding address, so he had heard nothing from his family for many years. But in Egypt Joseph had turned his liabilities into assets and had effectively capitalized his power of dreams and divinations which had had such unpleasant consequences in family circles. In fact, he had through this psychic gift arisen to prominence and distinction, being at this time business manager of Pharaoh’s kingdom. His brothers had recently come down to Egypt on business. There had been a family reunion which had caught the popular fancy and had greatly

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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stirred the love of romance always latent in Egyptian court circles. Gossip was running high. This self-made and prosperous business man had a past; that past was now bared to the public. Every one discussed it. Pharaoh himself heard the story.

At this point Pharaoh hastily summoned Joseph into the royal presence, and, surrounded by his courtiers, wisemen and other unslain attendants, he discussed the situation with him. "Joseph," said Pharaoh, "bring down your family into Egypt. I will give you the land of Goshen, which is the best agricultural district in my kingdom." Just here Pharaoh suddenly, for the first time, saw life from the point of view of one who is confronted with the necessity of packing his entire household goods. Then followed one of the most magnanimous of the lesser moments recorded in the sacred literatures. "Joseph," continued Pharaoh, "I have it! Bring your family down but don't bother to pack, for the fat of the land of Egypt is before you!"

Was there ever so generous an offer? "Chuck your stuff, Joseph. Life is too short to spend it in packing. What is furniture when one's peace of mind is at stake! Goshen is a land flowing with milk and honey, Joseph."

One wonders from what experience this advice springs; what is its background. Was Pharaoh

suddenly tired of the earthly clutter of things? His palace was filled with the bric-a-brac of the ages. Had he been hounded from his youth up with the discomfort of many possessions, hemmed in by the ancestral pottery, the stuffy draperies, the royal apparel? Did a great desire to shake off the fetters of an acquisitive society swiftly seize him?

This could not have been studied advice. Had he taken a second thought he would have remembered that the nomadic family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would not have had a great amount of excess baggage. In fact, if he had thought at all how could he have had the courage to make this wasteful proposal to his highly efficient business manager, whose program of economy had saved Egypt from famine and dire pestilence? Of course Pharaoh had had a little more than seven years of this thrift program and he might well have reached the stage of utterly rebellious profligacy. But very probably he did not weigh the matter at all. It was likely a swift, subconscious reaction. Pharaoh was strong on the subconscious anyway. His dreams were constantly bringing trouble and disaster to his bakers and cup bearers; his addiction to swift impulses had endangered his entire staff of wisemen.

Now the word went swiftly forth to Jacob in the land of Canaan, informing him of Pharaoh's

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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generosity. "Don't bother to pack! The rich land of Goshen will be yours and will supply your every need." What was the consternation of Jacob on receiving this instruction we do not know, but the protest of his actions is superb: "Israel went down into Egypt with *all* his property." The fat of the land of Egypt could not compare with his own goods. Could he leave behind in the land of Canaan the household implements with which his Grandmother Sarah had made ready the food for her celestial luncheon guests? Could he discard the well-worn skins on which the heavenly wayfarers had sat as they talked with his Grandfather Abraham? Those gods of Laban's which Rachel had borrowed from her father at the last minute on the occasion of another hasty departure—could these be deserted for images to be acquired in Goshen?

Though assured that he would have new property, Jacob could not leave behind loved possessions. It took a nomad to know the love of things, a wanderer over the face of the earth to appreciate the solid joy of household goods. Pharaoh, who had been sated with stable palaces and the luxurious contents thereof, knew not how properly to evaluate one's stuff. He could not envelop with joy this profusion of property, as could the nomad his scantiness of possessions.

*"DON'T BOTHER TO PACK, JOSEPH!"*

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Egyptian beads and pottery and funereal regalia are now being exhumed with scholarly interest. These ancient possessions of the Pharaohs are making their contribution to historical data. They make excellent content for museums but they have not sung themselves into the poetry of a world as have the simple desert things of the wandering herdsmen of Palestine. The rod and the staff of these shepherds have become spiritual symbols of eternal protection. The burning brazier of the desert caravan leader, lifted high to guide them in their journey, has become the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day for many who have made their way through the desert stretches of life. These nomads who daily faced the relinquishment of their possessions knew the intense love which may cling to them, and handed down their joy to other wanderers.

The world has never heeded this advice proposed by Pharaoh some three or four thousand years ago. It is written into a literature which is bulwarked by a peculiar authority, yet the Hebrew-Christian world still persists in packing. Our streets are yet clogged with moving-vans. If Pharaoh should come to our cities on the eve of the time when apartment leases expire, and propound his message on the street corners, he would be received with groans of approval; but even though he might offer new lamp-shades, new salt-

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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cellars, new pianos in the apartments of some Goshen, we, despite the fact that we loathe to pack, would probably reject his message. The day for the expiring of leases would doubtless find him fleeing for his life from the ponderous assiduity of moving-vans. In spite of extravagant Goshen offers, the world will very likely continue to pack.

Let those stationary Pharaohs advise us, if they will, to leave behind without regret our accumulated baggage, but as for me, I know that I shall enter every land of Egypt with all my property, for I shall forever be of the tribe of the nomads. When at the ages of five and seven and ten, at the word of an unseen bishop we pulled up our family tent stakes, I, the child of a prairie circuit rider, was initiated into the secrets of the pilgrims with no continuing city.

It was then that I learned the love of one's things. Much of my personal property at that period was of no intrinsic importance—old doll boxes, some dolls of battered mien and doubtful physique, a red-brick dining-room table, bits of broken flowered dishes, small cedar logs for furniture. There would be new doll boxes, new tables, new dishes, new cedarwood in the Goshen circuit, they told me, but what were those assurances of new possessions to me aged five and seven and ten? How could I leave those loved things be-



"DON'T BOTHER TO PACK, JOSEPH!"

hind? At least it was my prerogative to carry in my hand whatsoever things I might wish, even though they were of no worth. I cannot forget those final sortings; nor the curious bulging appearance which I presented as I stood waiting to get into the carriage. Highly fortunate was I if, at the last moment, I could persuade some brother to add another of my worthless boxes to the load on the wagons.

I love Jacob's entry into Egypt with *all* his children, *all* his sheep, *all* his household goods, even his Grandmother Sarah's best baking pans and his Grandfather Abraham's best tent stakes. And now that I have a voice in the superintending of exoduses, I get into a taxi with the unpackable residue of my stuff—coffee pots, four yellow breakfast cups, a camp stove and a toasting fork. "I'm sorry, Pharaoh," I apologize. "I regret to be taking all my property, but you cannot understand how it is, O King of Egypt, for Sunday morning breakfasts were not in your social calendar; and you have never sat about a camp-fire and had the angels of Jehovah stop in for a bit of food and conversation. You have never been served with coffee from a battered and blackened tin pail. You have never watched the stars from a tent door nor known there the winds of the night. Bird-filled mists and water lilies, pine trees and mountains, have endeared

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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these things to me, sir; and I have never been to Goshen. Your advice has an exalted and pleasant tone, O Egyptian monarch, but our incarnate spirits find it pleasant in Goshen to look about upon familiar things."

CHAPTER IX

RANDOM PROVOCATIONS

*There is a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people about, who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation . . . they cannot give themselves over to random provocations; they do not take pleasure in the exercise of their faculties for its own sake.*

—An Apology for Idlers: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## Random Provocations

“**Y**OU don’t mean to start off in the rain, do you?” asked the Maine horse owner with whom we were bargaining for the use of his horse for a week.

“We had thought to, if your horse does not object to rain,” we replied, for we held the opinion that rain was only to keep one from going to the places to which one does not want to go. He rose to a defense of his horse.

“He ain’t a hoss to mind the weather. I won’t say, either, that he is my best hoss. He ain’t even the one that I was aiming to give you, but he’ll get there and you’ll not find him prejudiced against the women folks, either.”

We turned our attention to the horse and contemplated him, wondering what revelations intimacy would make known to us. He did not look to be the horse that he himself had intended to be. Yet he seemed to have suitable qualities, since he did not give the impression of being a horse with a destination in view. No one would judge him to be in league with any far-off event. In fact, he gave every evidence of being the embodiment

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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of our desire; of our difficulty, the solution. We therefore dubbed him "Sol" for short.

Seeing that we were beginning to appreciate his horse, the owner grew more friendly. "Where are you aiming to go?" he asked. I am sure that this inquiry of the farmer was but rural pleasantry and that no deep design lurked therein, but it was an inconvenient question. How could we tell this Maine horse owner that we had no route in view; that we really doubted if *There* were a geographical center which one could reach by following sign-posted roads? We gestured evasively, therefore, in the general direction of the foothills of the White Mountains. We must have made answer with a guilty air, for we realized that it was heresy in this tourist section for a traveller to have no ultimate purpose.

With a hint of suspicion he then inquired, "By the way, c'n either of you drive a hoss?" He might well catechise us thus. *Could* we drive a horse? I was the only one who made any pretension to this profession. I had had early training in this rural art as well as in the allied knack of driving harnessed pigs, calves, cows, hens, dogs, goats and whatever other animals were extant in the period of my youth; and I thought that my general knowledge might supply any lack of recent practice. In a happy moment of inspiration I parried with a question, "Can I drive a horse?"

## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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Why, sir, did I forget to tell you that I am from Texas?" Gone were all his doubts. I had his utmost confidence. I stroked the horse as if from daily habit and gave a critical glance at the harness, concerning which I in truth had little definite memory. The farmer fell to tying on our blanket roll to the back of the old buggy. We put in our packs and I drove off with that semi-concerned air which the habitual driver falls into, shaking the whip in the socket as if I did not know but that it might be well to use it.

But when I faced the hitherto unconsidered etiquette of the highway and the necessity of supervising Sol's career, my courage failed. I remembered with sympathy that other driver, young Phaeton, Apollo's son, who, when his father's sun-chariot which he had so rashly insisted on driving for a day plunged into the terrifying mazes of ethereal traffic, was utterly lost. Would I meet with a like fate? I would not have the similar satisfaction of going down in a blaze of glory. The dilapidated buggy rattled a reassurance to me, yet it might prove a sun-chariot in disguise. We wished to go up a side street for oats, but Sol did not take a fancy to the route which I chose. I endeavored to back him and turn him in another direction but he was thoroughly averse to backing. Finally I gave up all retrogressive intentions, deeming it best to purchase oats of some farmer

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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in a quiet rural atmosphere where traffic would be more diluted. I looked about for another thoroughfare. There was still another, but a sign convinced me that well-meaning citizens did not from this point follow that course. Then, venturesome charioteer that I was forced into becoming, I seized the whip with which to accent the only remark left for me to make to Sol, "Sir, you simply must go forward!" With a bound we plunged into the rotating confusion and by that act became one with that assorted company of road-devouring mortals who perilously circulate hither and yon on the highways of the earth.

I cannot say that the roadside brotherhood received us with warm cordiality. They looked somewhat askance at my management of Sol, as well they might, for in this early stage of our acquaintance I must admit that Sol and I did not fully understand each other's purposes and personalities. There was not that perfect blending of interest in a common goal so essential to teamwork. It early appeared that Sol was the leader of the expedition, the hero of this exploit. He was not thoroughly open-minded but had decided preferences and repugnances in roads, which would have increased the likelihood of our not reaching a fixed destination, even if we had purposed to.

Yet I think it is not quite fair to hold Sol and myself entirely responsible for the disapproval



## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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with which our fellow travellers viewed us. The third party of this venture, Panthea, had a passionate devotion to that democratic musical institution, the harmonica. She had developed some technical skill in the use of tongue and finger movements, but the melody which issued forth from our caravan had a wild and hilarious lilt in it which was evidently not a customary accompaniment to traffic in this region. So is there any wonder that the tourists in this section, seeing this incipient Calliope in their path, gave us wide berth?

The rain continued. The handle of the whip, to which I had to resort more and more, began to dissolve into an enveloping glue. The water dripped through a hole in the roof of our wheeled abode, forcing us to divide ourselves and baggage neatly into two parts. We pursued our liquid way. By noon the world was thoroughly wet and we had given up the idea of cooking dinner out of doors until we came upon a cooper's shop with a large outer shed. Panthea put aside her harmonica and went in to inquire of the cooper if we might cook dinner under his shed. The cooper himself walked out personally to extend the invitation. He was a gallant, thin man. I felt at first glance that he would look well if done in cardboard. He cast a meditative eye upon us and at length said, "My stove is as good as another's. Come in here and cook your dinner."

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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His stove proved really better than another's. The primary function of this stove was the drying of the barrels with which the cooper deftly encircled it when he had girded the barrel into life. To us, soaked, cold, it sent forth a swift lateral heat which drew the water from our soggy clothing. Solitude seemed especially native to this cooper, but he watched with open interest our preparations for dinner, the securing of milk and tomatoes from a farmhouse, the frying of the tomatoes. The clean fragrance of the drying barrels was soon flavored with the aroma of coffee and of flour-dipped tomatoes growing brown in hot butter. The cooper accepted our invitation to lunch with growing sociability, and we sat about on birch logs and pine strips, using respective barrels for luncheon tables. Almost as if by magic he began to expand. The cardboard impression gradually faded and he acquired a third dimension. His lonely vocation had induced philosophical thought and he discussed the craft of barrel-making and the apple business of Maine. As we finally gathered up our things and made our plans for departure into the rain outside, he gave us a bundle of dry birchwood kindling, nodding, "Good day." He then went busily about making barrels again, as if for this purpose he had come.

## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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Solomon had lunched at the farmhouse on oats and water. By now we had thus lengthened his name to Solomon, for his meagre grandeur needed the prestige of a name that would reenforce any latent glory that might be concealed in his gaunt frame. Solomon now slanted his head against the rain and shoved nobly ahead along roads unknown to us. We had become aware of the way he felt about certain things—hills, for instance. He was fond of going up a hill. He climbed a hill from no sense of duty apparently, but was urged on as if by some inner affection for the ascent. He had an actor's sense of climax—but here his histrionic gifts ended. When he had attained the peak he could not be persuaded that there was anything further to do about it. As far as he was concerned the curtain had dropped. He took his stand on the heights as if he had performed his entire duty. In the ensuing conflict between his desire to remain on the summit and our determination to go down, Solomon was forced to compromise, choosing a resultant course in which he sidled down hills on the bias. This peaceful settlement of the dispute was satisfactory until we met automobiles rapidly ascending. Seeing our dubious state, the motorists would waver impatiently, then shoot past us, leaving in their gasolined wake that most scornful of reproofs, "Isn't that just like a woman!" Solomon

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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and his sex entirely escaped calumny—as if driving a horse were not a dual proposition!

When we reached a hill-less territory again it occurred to me that the propitious moment had come to launch upon a little social venture which I had long cherished. I had a pleasant recollection of peddlers who in my youth had found their way to our door infrequently for the purpose of selling egg-beaters, mending tissue, schemes for replating silver, and stereoscopes with their marvelous disclosures of grottoes and ruined cities, my first glimpse of the Parthenon. Had they thrown aside their guise of peddlers and revealed themselves as messengers divinely appointed for our delight, they could not have been better received by the younger members of the household. This was my memory of those wayside merchants of delectable necessities.

I felt that I should now go forth as an ostensible salesman. Since I was in the vicinity of New England I had considered all practical utensils and had at length chosen a can-opener. It was no ordinary can-opener which bruises one's palms and rips open one's fingers, but a very superior mechanical device which was operated by turning a flat screw. It was as simple as the winding of a watch. I knew from experience that I was doing any household a favor when I suggested the purchase of one of these.

## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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Seeing a prosperous farmhouse, I gave the reins to Panthea, who was not at all in sympathy with this social undertaking of mine. She took up a book and began to read with no sense of obligation. I went nobly through the rain and knocked at the door. As I waited I reflected on the ideal aspects of the weather for just such an enterprise. Everyone would be rained in and a guest would be a happy diversion. The door opened. Automatically with the opening of the door I began, "I should like to show you a can-opener."

"I have a can-opener," the woman announced quite definitely.

"But this can-opener is far better than the usual one," I assured her.

"Mine opens cans," she stated with finality, as if, so far as she was concerned, the encounter was ended.

I remembered quickly that my primary object was not to sell can-openers but to exchange the amenities of life. I was, therefore, not a prejudiced salesman. Now, I had caught her point of view immediately. If I had stayed a week I could not have understood her more thoroughly. She was the kind of person who, if she has a can-opener which will open cans, wants to do no further investigation, this one being entirely sufficient. In

fact, I spoke at length to Panthea on my return, relating the entire biography of this estimable woman, her peculiarly conclusive nature, her permanent ideas at the age of six. Another possible purchaser informed me, "I am trying to get my wife not to use things in tin cans." He spoke with a vehemence that made me see the total domestic situation. I, too, had a preference for homegrown products, and I could not weaken his campaign.

I soon realized that if my sales business were to succeed, I had to refuse to see the situation from the other person's point of view. I must not discuss the can-openers with them; I must preach can-openers at them. I could not do this. Soon I found myself dividing all passers-by into possible purchasers or non-purchasers of my wares. "Now he looks like a person who would (or would not) invest!" My motive had been social, but I was by this very means shutting myself off from social intercourse. It was at this point that I gave up the sale of can-openers, having reached the conclusion that they would be better bartered for way-side courtesies. I regretted not having given one to the cooper and the woman who had insisted on giving us tomatoes. That moment of my decision was a humiliating one, especially in the presence of Panthea, but it was fraught with a beneficence which we were soon to taste.



## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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In the late afternoon we began to look at barns with a critical eye, considering their appropriateness as sleeping quarters for the night, both for ourselves and Solomon. It was late before we found one that seemed altogether right, for there is a personality in barns, and the selection of a proper one is a high form of the itinerant's art. We lighted a little folding lantern by way of greeting and drove up the hill. Solomon was always an asset at these critical moments. His pathetic guilelessness, always preceding us, had a dumb persuasiveness about it that weighted the balances in our favor.

"Good evening," we said.

"Good evening," they of the farmhouse replied. Both parties referred to the rain and then we boldly plunged into the key question.

"May we sleep in your barn tonight?" This is not the simple question that it seems to be. It often involves an explanation of one's whole philosophy of life, one's professional and moral status, plus many stray bits of information. It is not easy to explain politely why you prefer freshly gathered timothy and clover in a barn loft to the spare-room with its family portraits, pin-cushions, souvenirs and its wall-paper—above all, its wall-paper. Considering the habit of sleeping in houses

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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with attendant portraits, pin-cushions, souvenirs and wall-paper, to which man has been accustomed for many generations, sleeping in a barn or apple orchard is a bit unusual.

Though we could not fully explain ourselves, they took us on faith, a tendency in barn owners which you have to foreknow when you stop at their farm. We spread our blankets in the sweetly scented hay and by our flashlight read Irish fairy stories while the crickets tip-toed about in the hay with elephantine steps. Then sleep came down to us through the grey gloom of the cob-webbed rafters.

For sleep such as this could not one well afford to barter even a very superior can-opener? Then did we become cognizant of the true magic of this excellent and painless device for opening cans. By what means may one impart any understanding of the miracles consequent to the presentation and demonstration of such a can-opener with all the family gathered about the kitchen table—peach marmalade, hot breakfast biscuits, coffee, cream and morning conversation? Did we wish to see the crochet which won the prize at the county fair and did we know that our hostess also won the first prize on cranberries?

These rites concluded, we joined Solomon at the barn door and sought in every way to encourage him about the day's journey and to im-



part to him something of the joy of setting out in the morning. Before us was the flavor of unknown roads. Children waved from a gate; and dogs were a-wag with the phenomenal pleasantness of life.

Nor did the day disappoint us. The sun shone. So thoroughly gay was life that we, with a touch of solemnity, took from our baggage balloons of many colors, which we had provided in the hope that some such occasion as this might arise. We tied some to our golden phaeton whose glory was yet undiminished, attaching others to the brass rings of Solomon's collar, a red one to the left, a green one to the right. Solomon's balloons served as port and starboard lights on our inland tug, thus indicating at least the route which we had originally intended to take in case he fell to backing unexpectedly before we could signal to tourists his possible manœuvres. "A horse is indeed a vain thing," we meditated as we beheld the rear elevation of Solomon's balloon-crowned presence.

If in the beginning the harmonica had given a hint of errant tendencies, the balloons now utterly confirmed current suspicion. We threw to the winds all claims to orthodoxy, openly admitting that we were not hastening to any destination. We considered *Here* to be as good as *There*; that *Here* was *There*. These white birches, these flam-

ing maples, these little roads filled with leaf-sifted sunlight, we maintained thus to passers-by, were the equal of any birches, maples and sunlight. It is surprising how vocal balloons may be to herald this philosophic truth. Balloons, born of nothing, *en route* to nowhere, are iridescent symbols of intensity of joy, tethered frailly to the here and now.

Those who eternally hurried gave their swift allegiance to some tomorrow that lay beyond. *There* seemed forever in the distance. Did they arrive, we wondered? We could never decide, but they seemed to have time to make no offerings on green and scarlet altars, to break no sacramental bread by quiet brooks. How did they dare risk such reckless impiety even in these times?

For this night we borrowed a hillside from a farmer and a small brook at its foot. Much wood and shavings for our evening fire had been washed down the stream from a neighboring saw-mill. It did not rain that night nor was there any cloud to hide a star. With no interruption the stars clinked their way across the night.

By the time we had our fire kindled for breakfast, a farmer called from another hill, "Would you like a little fresh corn for breakfast?" The hospitable hills repeated with rejoicing:

"Fresh corn for breakfast?"

## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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We consulted, and shouted back, "Yes!"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" the hillsides reenforced our delight, making us seem too eager. I crossed the brook to the cornfield but not until I had armed myself with a shining gift. The farmer knelt down on one knee and shucked and silked the corn. Then I, also kneeling down, demonstrated the can-opener and presented him with it. He was rapturous, that is, as far as Maine farmers can lend themselves to rapture. I returned to our fire. We had already decided, that morning, to have a special fête with the coffee, that is, make it with an egg and make large quantities. We soon had ready the corn, an omelet, toast and very excellent coffee, when Panthea interrupted, "Look up the hill!"

I turned and saw the farmer coming down the hill, solemnly, with hands uplifted, bearing on high a tray. He approached and presented us with a New England Sunday morning oblation—baked beans and pumpkin pie, together with coffee cream in a glass pitcher bordered with red. "My wife thought you might need these for breakfast." Then he wished us good-morning.

Our breakfast was fast becoming a divine cause in this vicinity and a mortal inadequacy laid hold of us. This was certainly not a repast to be devoured with a glance, and we set to work sys-

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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tematically to effect its consummation. This in part explains why we could not hurry from this hillside. Also, it was a fine morning for the scrubbing and airing of our pots and pans. There was sand in the brook and mint growing along the bank, which proved marvelous incentives for pot-cleaning. With crushed mint and sand we removed all signs of camp-fire black and added an extra polish, for never had we known such a fragrant process. For wayside housekeeping there is river moss and sand, and seaweed and sand where, with the tide rushing in, the ocean is momentarily transformed into a mighty kitchen sink—but of all methods the best is a sandy brook, lined with mint.

When we came to the disposal of the eggshells, I hesitated and then confessed: "I once read about pygmies who sailed about in eggshells. I always wanted to send forth such an expedition. Now here are six shells and a boundless deep and no public opinion." Panthea quickly sensed the possibilities. We added flavor to the affair by inserting masts of small yellow candles, which we had in our pack in case we wished suddenly to celebrate. Lighting the candles, we launched the frail fleet on the little brook. To our amazement the flames of the candles acted as sails and turned the shells up stream as if steered by unseen sailors seeking ports of their own choosing. We found

## *RANDOM PROVOCATIONS*

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ourselves rushing about like protecting goddesses, sending forth a mighty wind here, rescuing there another fair sail.

Then the fiery masts diminished; the yellow sails were lowered and folded away by invisible hands. We, looking on, fell to wondering if all adventure does not begin before we are seven. Had not our morning really begun when a child sat gazing at a peddler's marvelous wares and treasured up in her heart the miracle of pygmies who went down to the sea in eggshells? Anyway, as we departed from the hillside and the pygmy sea we left an offering to something—whether it was to youth or adventure or farmers, I cannot say—a green balloon hovering over a small bush on the bank of the stream.

But not forever could we wander thus. From afar Solomon sensed the home-going turn that affairs had taken, and if ever he could be said to leap, he leaped now. The hills no longer found him hesitant. Was his straightforward course due altogether to his joy at going home or partly to the fact that he and I had now come to an understanding of each other?

A great relief overspread the face of the owner of Solomon as we returned the horse intact, leaving the reputation of Texas unsullied in the memory of a Maine farmer.

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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"Did my hoss prove satisfactory?" he asked.

"Entirely satisfactory, sir," we answered. "He did get *There!*"

"That's good!"

"Very good!"

CHAPTER X

“BOSTON”





## "Boston"

**I**HAD not hurried to Boston. I had felt no impatience to fulfill the wish that had begun to fashion itself within my heart that summer morning on Pleasant Ridge, for I knew that I was divinely appointed some day to arrive in this celestial city, the holy land of my youth. I stood now in its actual streets—at least, I accepted the prevailing opinion that these were the streets of Boston. Were there not the convincing churches and here and there the dim footprints of that one who went forth hastily into the night bent on a patriotic errand? Did not the streets have that nonchalant indirectness of which I had heard? I had not expected that any streets could so perfectly qualify as thoroughfares of the city of God as did these streets of Boston; for narrow was the way and few there were who could find it. It is true that straight was not the road as spiritual highways should be, but in all heavenly blueprints whose specifications are drawn by mortal hands some allowance must be made for human error.

Indeed, as I stood in the sunshine on Beacon Hill I was certain that I had arrived in very Bos-

## *VAIN POMP AND GLORY*

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ton of very Boston. Yet as I looked down at this city I knew that some mystic ambiguity would forever hover about it. There would ever be another Boston, more real than this, a citadel of shining portals that had once sheltered my dreams of good, that had sent out its legions to lay siege against the outposts of drabness; resplendent was that other Boston with the gleam of fine linens and silver-tonged candies. From this immortal metropolis there goes ever forth the delicate fragrance of mothballs that once had saved my soul from dullness.

I walked down through the Common. Then memory did a curious thing. It filled the paths about me with shadowy figures, playmates of my childhood, children of the laity to whom I had proclaimed the marvelous glories of Boston. There was "Stokey," the boy who lived across the road, who had had measles along with us; and the girl who sat with me in school. She still wore that envied scarlet coat trimmed with goat's hair. I recognized some others, among whom were the children whose father owned the cotton-gin. In their midst I saw also the child that I had been, hair so tightly braided that the roots rose in red rebellion, ribbon plaited in with the hair at the end and the braid rolled under and tied, to prevent its catching on the buttons down the back of my dress. This child was gleefully wav-

ing a miraculous parchment, postmarked "Boston," and she was saying to the other children: "This is the city I've been telling you about. The barrels and boxes and *Youth's Companions* came from here—and God lives here!" Thus was the Common filled with invisible escorts who showed every intention of going with me. My companions were mounted on stick-horses, for it was always in this manner that we ventured forth to explore the world.

*En masse* did I proceed through the Common, enveloped with youthful wonder and potential adventure. It was just as well that I was in no hurry and that I found delight in lingering by the Frog Pond, for stick-horses have an insatiable passion for drinking, as all who have dealings with them know, and it is the custom to pass by no watering-place without permitting these inebriates to quench their astounding thirst.

I knew that soon this company would halt my passage and would deafen me with their impertunity to know, "And where does God live?" I might in the beginning playfully evade them by stating with that air of finality which grown-ups often assume when they are least assured, "You see, children of the prairies, all prominent personages of Boston live in the suburbs and you could never unravel a Boston suburb from this." In spite of my evasive remarks, I knew that they

looked up hopefully at all tall buildings in search of the house of God, and if evening came and they could not find it they would return to their far prairies disconsolate.

Much in the manner of one who plays whip-crack, I swung into the most complicated section of Boston. Not Paul Revere himself could have galloped so daringly through these streets as these phantom riders. They were absolutely indifferent to flashing traffic remarks, and many times I lost them altogether, but they soon came dashing back, these soundless, barefoot equestrians, the swishing of whose horses' tails were muffled by the years, a loss to be regretted, for the glory of such a steed is largely in the loud flourish of his tail.

"Where's the *Youth's Companion*?" inquired the child with the tightly plaited hair.

"What's the use companion?" asked another.

"You don't know what it is?" the braided one spoke in surprise. "Why it's slick and it smells like a new geography and it's read aloud on Sunday afternoon! That's where Minnie Rollins came from."

"Who's Minnie Rollins? Did she help pack the barrels?"

"No!"

"Was she one of the story ladies?"

"Indeed she is not," Stokey informed them.

## "BOSTON"

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"Minnie Rollins, she's alive as anything. She's their pinkish-tan cow. She nearly killed herself in our cane patch last summer."

"Do they send cows to every one who reads the *Youth's Companion*?" she in the scarlet coat ventured speculatively. The question was referred to me.

"I presume that you are the only family that has received a cow from a Boston periodical," I answered. Seeing that the children still looked mystified, I added, "Certain people here in Boston had the custom of sending her family a roll of *Youth's Companions* every month and tucking in between the pages an envelope with money which was designated for various causes. Once they sent money for a cow."

"Wouldn't there be any chance of their sending us a cow?" the one in scarlet besought me.

"I think not. Boston, I understand, still has great faith in the rewards which come to one from perusing the better forms of literature, but the reward is in different coin. You would not understand, perhaps. Literature pays the reader, they believe, but in culture rather than cows."

"Boston must be very rich," they sighed, as we wandered in and out of the headquarters of elegance, pausing now and then before velvet gowns

and jeweled mysteries. "This could be Montgomery Ward's!" an awed voice exclaimed.

"It is no doubt quite similar to it," I assured her, not wishing to destroy her rural loyalties, "though there might be differences of opinion."

"Perhaps this is more elegant," she modified.

"I think that would be the Bostonian point of view."

Then a great excitement arose among them and shouts of delight burst forth. We had come without warning upon a candy store which I had not realized existed save only in dreams. The prairie cavaliers hastily dismounted, threw their reins to the winds of heaven and took possession of the beautiful counters lined with indubitable miracles. One among them stood reverently gazing at the dainty linings of paper lace and at the shining tongs. The glistening, cushioned candies were to her as halleluiahs shouted in green and silver, lavender and pink. No need was there now for further information concerning the dwelling-place of preëminent Bostonians. With wonder she was held spellbound, whereupon she solemnly avowed, "This is none other than the house of God!"

After an interval which may have been long, I found myself at the threshold laden with their purchases, for, as is the manner of youth, they took no responsibility for carrying the material consequences of their eagerness. I turned to one



of the officials of these dainties and gave her their purchases together with an address of a child in an inconsequential town of the West. For one of the omniscients she was surprisingly ignorant of Texas geography.

"Any message to be mailed with this?" she asked loftily, as an all-knowing immortal should.

"Let me see—perhaps," I replied meekly as a mid-western mortal would. A possible inscription lingered on my tongue—"With love from God in Boston." But a moment's reflection on the practices of the gods through the ages convinced me that this celestial benefaction should be sent anonymously. The genius of the gods for inarticulateness has ever stimulated the soul to wonder.

"No message, thank you," I answered.

The shadowy figures began now to desert the golden pavements as if they were content with the explorations of this day. They entirely fell away from me as I walked into the Common again. I was soon encompassed with a winged intimacy of feathered beauty; and here and there boot-blacks bent a knee in homage to their trade. I, a pilgrim from western prairies, had need to make some offering at this public shrine, for this was for me the city of the nativity of wonder; and here some glory had been resident. Were there prayers of pilgrimage that I should chant, or

should I set aflame some holy taper? But as I saw the hurrying multitude in the streets, I knew that there were offerings more meet, and I laid on the altars of the Common gifts which I had brought from the prairies, gifts of leisure and silences and the endlessness of unmeasured spaces. Beacon Hill looked benignly down at me and I judged, therefore, that my sacrifices must have found favor with the gods.

But soon an odor disturbingly pungent began to penetrate my meditations, pricking my conscience into some activity not thoroughly pleasant. At first it was vague, indefinite, until the wind swept it into certainty—*shoe-blackening*! In its wake came a glimpse of Pleasant Ridge hot in the sun, and a remembrance of rows of people in council assembled. There was sunlight on faded red carpet. Then came words of exceeding beauty—"Will you renounce the vain pomp and glory of the world? Your answer is, 'We renounce them all.' Should I? Or should I walk grandly down the aisle shouting, "No, I will not renounce them all!" At least I should have the approval of Boston. I smiled to remember this wholesale repudiation of the glory of the world, made by me who had so little data in hand at the age of eight.

I recalled also some dim determination to appeal the case of pomp and glory to Boston. Where were the advocates of elegance now—these people



who had sent the boxes? In what houses had they lived? The one who had included that immortal five-pound box of candy—would I not find here a protagonist for pomp and glory? I knew their last names, for they had been well preserved in the christening of various members of our family. But if I should succeed in finding any of them, what could I say to these elderly ladies? Would they indeed be pleased to be informed of the influence which they had unwittingly exercised on my private theology? I wondered how one could ring a doorbell and have any success at explaining one's appreciation of long-remembered loveliness. At length I concluded to press no electric buttons in the residential section of Boston's select society.

As I pondered the question I looked up at the embattlements of heaven, and by some miracle Pleasant Ridge seemed to take its stand by Beacon Hill. I studied these ancient foes: the one caustic with shoe-blackening; the other redolent with moth-balls. Other hills assembled, a low, grey one lighted with orange berries, and some with waterfalls and eleven pine trees. Then Beauty, child of a thousand hills, descended, and her train filled the temples of blue and purple, grey and green. Her robe was blue, blue as the signal lights on elevated railways; and on the hem of her garment were pomegranates and golden bells, golden bells and pomegranates of blue and purple and

## VAIN POMP AND GLORY

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scarlet; and the golden bells tinkled as she walked, the music sounding on every hill.

Swiftly I lighted all the candles in my heart as her glory shone around about me. I became before her as a little child—and before me stretched rows of public opinion. She seemed standing in the midst of the saints of Pleasant Ridge and, though she spoke no word to them, the eyes of their understanding were opened. Some confusion fell from me, also. Then did the saints go clambering about the world to return to me the beauty which they had unknowingly taken away from me. One brought to me a pale slivered moon, and another made offering of a blue-green river. They piled my arms high with prairies, and sky that was lavender in the late evening and lighted by a star. I tilted my chin to its upmost that I might make room for these re-acquired possessions.

With that upward movement of my head I came to myself. What dreams were these? What glory was this ascending and descending Beacon Hill? Surely God—but here I stopped myself. Would I never get over my childish habit of localizing the deity in accordance with my own enthusiasm? Who was I to be making Olympian assignments? The gods might have their own preferences in the matter of earthly abodes. My choices might not be their choices. I turned to-

## *"BOSTON"*

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ward Beacon Hill. The Common was almost deserted now. The feathered tribe had gone and the bootblacks had retired. There were no spectators here to prescribe the manner of my Elysian exit, so what if my spirit swaggered a bit as I climbed the hill? May not a mortal swagger when he has just had returned to him a star set in lavender dusk and a pale slip of silver long lost?













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